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By

Sir Laurence and Lady Gomme.

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# British Folk-lore, Folk-songs, and Singing Games.

BY SIR LAURENCE AND LADY GOMME.

I KNOW of no subject quite so generally useful as folk-lore for home reading and home study. It is so human in its origin and in the philosophy it teaches; it appeals so strongly to characteristics which reside in varying proportions in all of us; it is so rich in local associations; it tells such a wonderful story of man's past and helps so exactly in the understanding of man's present; it is so pathetic, and in many branches so beautiful, that it is difficult to get rid of its fascinations when once one has begun to understand it. It deals with the legends and traditions of our ancestors, and the beliefs, rites, and customs of our contemporaries. The legends and traditions, whether in the shape of nursery tale or hero story, or of ballad and song, are the product of many generations of faithful narrators who, in the act of transmitting to their successors the tradition which was handed to them, have insensibly and gradually woven it into a magnificent artistic narrative—so artistic that when it has been reduced from tradition to literature it awakens fresh interest and begins a new life in its literary form. The beliefs, rites, and customs recorded by collectors are at once recognized as something apart from modern thought and modern science, and, by their very contrast to these, become a subject of intellectual consideration and inquiry.

There are now many books which deal with these subjects, and the list presented to our readers, though it contains the best examples in various departments, is by no means exhaustive. It is well to begin at the beginning, and it is well

to resolve upon traversing the whole subject before beginning to study any one branch. The nursery tale is perhaps the best subject to begin upon. Even in these days, if we have not ourselves heard tales in the nursery, we have read them in books prepared for the purpose, and no one who has had any home life at all is quite ignorant of these delightful reminders of childhood's days. But what if the story of Cinderella or Catskin, of Childe Rowland or Jack the Giant Killer, is not only all we have thought it to be in our childhood, but something more to our maturer years? In the pages of Mr. Sidney Hartland's *Science of Fairy Tales*, Sir Richard Temple's introduction to *Wide Awake Stories*, and Mr. Campbell's introduction to *Highland Tales*, the reader is made acquainted with the chapters of human history which lie hidden in these traditions. No one has dealt with ballads and songs quite in the same way. Collections exist in goodly quantity, but no recognized authority has yet put before the reader all that these echoes from the past may mean. Mr. Sharp's splendid work on the folk-songs from our English counties and Miss Broadwood's collection of the same kind contain some of the best specimens, and many a reader will recognize new beauties in songs heard in the country village when he renews acquaintance with them by means of these books.

With beliefs, rites, and customs a very great deal has been accomplished. To these, in a very special sense, Dr. Tylor's definition of survival more particularly applies. They are, for the most part, survivals of the long since displaced pre-Christian religions of our ancestors, and such works as Dr. Tylor's *Primitive Culture* and Dr. Frazer's *Golden Bough* exemplify the remarkable value for historical purposes which attaches to this branch of folk-lore. People living in the midst of modern civilization have not all progressed up to the same standard, and those who have lagged behind, preferring to do what their fathers have done before them, have preserved in their periodical ceremony their household practice, and, if you will, their superstitions, much of what their remote ancestors practised or believed as part of a recognized form of religion. We thus once more come upon historical material of a most important nature. Nowhere else can be obtained the information which is to be derived from this source. The halting places in man's history from the earliest stages may be recovered from this study as well as some of the more restricted phases of his career. It is well to understand what can be obtained from a study of a special body of custom and



belief, and in my own little book, *Ethnology in Folk-lore*, will be found an attempt to show that the racial distinctions of the earliest times in Britain are traceable by means of the survivals of custom and belief among the peasantry of modern days.

To the nursery tales must be added the nursery games. These are now dying out, and yet they contain, by the machinery of their preservation through many generations of children taught by mothers and nurses, facts of our oldest history. They mimic the acts of the men and women of old times, and in this way bring back to us pictures of old life and manners of a particularly vivid description. This branch of folk-lore has been studied exhaustively, and Lady Gomme's *Traditional Games of Children in England, Scotland, and Ireland* affords a good example of what can be accomplished from a complete study of a special branch of folk-lore.

Apart from those books which deal with the science of the subject, there are many collections, pure and simple, of legends, traditions, ballads, songs, customs, beliefs, and games. All these may be read with a great deal of pleasure. Care is needed to distinguish the good collection of these facts from the comments which the collector sometimes indulges in. A good collection of folk-lore is not always—or, rather, is very seldom—a safe guide for discussion of the origin or significance of any given item. But, these defects aside, the fine collections at the disposal of readers will repay perusal.

And, if the reader should pass from the stage of reader to that of student, should desire to add to the sum of man's knowledge of man, there is a great work before him. He may collect still the remaining fragments of traditional story or traditional custom and belief. And the work of collection will be a delight and pleasure to him; for it will introduce him to men and women of great character and individuality, living documents of history. He may help to classify and arrange the material already collected, so that it may be ready for the use of the scientific scholar. The work is not difficult to a patient and systematic worker. It will be warmly received by many distinguished scholars, who would gladly welcome such aid to their own labours, and who would always freely recognize and make acknowledgment for such help. Organized bands of workers, spending their winter evenings in this way, would find themselves doing something of importance for the world of thought and research.

But, finally, there is the net result of the reading and the work upon the mind. It is the greatest subject for teaching



man to love man, by first teaching man to understand man. Every great religious and holy thought and act has a long history at the back of it, and it brings about a sense of proportion, a magnanimity of conception concerning other people's aims and aspirations to know something of the genesis of thought. The greatest books of the world can be interpreted best by the aid of folk-lore, and, whether we are reading of our own history or of the Bible history, we understand the facts better, because we understand the actors in the greatest historical drama, men and women both, by seeing them through the glasses which folk-lore supplies.

In considering the possibilities open to a reader of this subject, we shall find that so much of the student's work in folk-lore depends upon books that the reader may well become the student and worker, and this incentive makes the subject of more than ordinary interest. But to read properly and advisedly it is necessary to have some sort of guide, and I propose now to turn to the books and attempt to direct attention to the method to be adopted by the reader who is about to take up this subject.

Above all things, it is necessary not to specialize too early. The reader in folk-lore should be acquainted with all its branches before he allows himself to like one branch so much as to read only in that branch. If he wants to read and understand all that is to be found in folk-tales and legends, he must know, at all events generally, what is to be found in custom and superstition and in song and ballad, and so on throughout the entire range.

The first books to go to are those which are essentially collections of folk-lore, and it is well to discriminate between books which have been written by those who have done the work of collection themselves—those who have been at work among the folk tapping their stores of knowledge before it was too late—and books which, though they are not more than collections of folk-lore, have been compiled by authors who have used the work of collectors, but have not collected themselves. The former have a charm about them altogether impossible to the latter. They introduce the reader to the old gaffers and gammers who relate the legend because they have known it and loved it all their lives, because they had heard it from their parents, who in turn had heard it from theirs, and so on through the ages. Nothing is quite so real as this. Or, it may be, they introduce peasants, or those of higher culture than peasants, who perform a custom because it would be unlucky not to perform it; who believe in some



curious superstition because it had been impressed upon them by their forbears, and because it had a hold upon their minds which none of the forces of civilization had been able to eradicate. And sometimes the local touch is contained in a dialect word or phrase as quaint as it is impressive.

Of all the books of this class I think I should choose the Rev. Walter Gregor's *Notes on the Folk-lore of North-East of Scotland* as the best specimen. It tells us of birth ceremonies, customs relating to the child, baptism, the nursery, boy code of honour; about the human body, dreams and divination, leechcraft, the house, evenings at the fireside, fairies, water kelpie, ghosts, witches, "black airt" and devil compacts, riddles, marriage, place rhymes, place and family characteristics, animal and plant superstitions, trees and seasons and weather, Christmas and New Year's Day, countings out, washing day, farming, boats and fishing, death, and burial. No one can read this book without being impressed by its simplicity, its sincerity, and its absolute faithfulness to the people from whom all its contents were garnered. It depicts what there is to be found in the folk-lore of a particular district, and it explains as in a mirror what folk-lore consists of and why it is so interesting. "To give an account of the olden time in the North as seen by myself and as related to me by the aged is the task I have set before me," are Mr. Gregor's words, and his equipment for the task was that he lived the life and simply told his story. Of English collections Henderson's *Folk-lore of the Northern Counties* is the best in many respects, but the reader has to be warned here that the author has a certain amount of theory mixed up with his undoubtedly valuable collection. His theories are crude and valueless, but he obtained his materials from genuine sources, and the touch is there. Of a higher order altogether is Miss Burnes's *Shropshire Folk-lore*, unfortunately now out of print. This is a collector's book entirely, but with the added charm of additional notes from a rich storehouse of knowledge placed at the disposal of the reader rather than thrust forward for him to accept without criticism. Then such books as Harland and Wilkinson's *Lancashire Folk-lore* and some local collections of lesser note will find their place. All of them treat of similar subjects, though, of course, not equally thoroughly. Leaving the domain of custom and belief for that of folk-tale and tradition, it is remarkable that England does not possess a national collection, though Mr. Joseph Jacobs's *English Fairy Tales* tries to take that place. Mr. Jacobs, however, is not quite true to his own standard. He



edits the folk-tales for the use of children, and this is unpardonable from the collectors' point of view. In Scotland the great book is, of course, Campbell's *Tales of the West Highlands*, collected from the people, faithfully recorded, and every detail given to make it a model work. It is very charming; the record is so faithful that each story wants to be recited or read aloud in order to get out its fullness of local colour and its extraordinary richness of detail. There is no collection quite like it, though Sir Richard Temple's *Wide Awake Stories* and Miss Frere's *Old Deccan Days*, two collections of Hindu stories, come very near to it. There are one or two collections of Irish folk-tales, such as Larminie's *West Irish Folk-tales* and Kennedy's *Fireside Stories of Ireland*, which are of special value from the point of view we are considering, namely, that of the pure collector setting forth his material just as it was gathered from the folk.

The folk-tale when collected will appeal to many readers quite apart from its value as tradition. The record of custom, belief, and usage, however, has no such claim upon attention. Many may perhaps turn aside to wonder at the marvellous stupidity of people who can do such strange things and believe such strange faiths simply on the strength of what their parents or neighbours have told them. But gradually this feeling wears away, and is replaced by the all-important conception that in these records of tradition, folk-tale, and folk-custom alike we are in the presence of a different order of civilization from that which the State, the Churches, and the schools proclaim—a civilization much more primitive, much less advanced. And at once it appears to be worth asking about this state of things preserved from tradition by the folk of our own country. Whether we look to custom or whether we look to the folk-tale, there is plain evidence of a people who have a cult of their own. They are baptized, married, and buried according to the rules of the Christian Church, but before and after the Church rite in each case they go through a family rite which is to them as important and as real as the Church rite.

And so before we have left the pure work of collection, before we have finished reading simply the records of collectors of these out-of-the-way things, we are beginning to see that they have a special interest all their own, and we know quite well that, whatever their value may ultimately prove to be, they can be found nowhere else but in the huts and homes of the outlying folk or in those recorded collections which open the doors of folk-lore to the reader.



I now pass to the second class of books which form the foundation of folk-lore reading, namely, those books which are essentially collections of folk-lore, but which have not been collected by the authors direct from the people. There are, of course, many of these which are simply the crudest of the scissors and paste kind of book; there are others, on the contrary, which are of great value, and which no reader in folk-lore can neglect.

Of the latter class, Brand's *Popular Antiquities* stands out pre-eminently first. This book has had an interesting history. It began in 1725 with a small book, *Antiquitates Vulgares, or The Antiquities of the Common People*, by Henry Bourne, who was perpetual curate of All Saints' Chapel, Newcastle-on-Tyne. This book was a genuine collection of customs and usages of the people, combined with observations by the author, "shewing which may be retain'd and which ought to be laid aside." It must be remembered it was written at a time when many people wished to improve upon the sombre puritanism of the age, which denied to the people the right of enjoyment except in certain directions dictated by religious feelings of the narrowest order, and when many other people protested against such an improvement on the ground that all popular usages and ceremonies were but the product of "popery," or, as Randolph expressed it in a poem of 1646:

These teach that *Dancing* is a Jezabell  
And *Barley Break* the ready way to hell;  
The *Morrice Idols*, *Whitsun ales* can be  
But prophane reliques of a Jubilee;  
These in a zeal t'expresse how much they do  
The *Organs* hate, have silenced *Bagpipes* too;  
And harmless *Maypoles* all are rail'd upon  
As if they were the Tow'rs of Babylon.

Nothing can exceed the debt folk-lorists owe to the Rev. Mr. Bourne for this book. We may despise his observations if we will, but we must respect his collection of popular rights and usages, got together at a time when they were slipping away from the ken of all.

This book had a great effect upon public opinion, and in 1777 Mr. John Brand, of Lincoln College, Oxford, published a new edition under the title of *Observations of Popular Antiquities*, which included the whole of Bourne's book, "with addenda to every chapter of that work, as also an appendix containing such articles on the subject as have been omitted by that author." Brand undoubtedly added to our

knowledge by first-hand collection, but he was far more interested in the literature of the subject, and sought for analogies and origins in classical authorities. We here get the old order of antiquarian research which traced out origins by way of chronological precedence, and did not take count of the fact that a nation or people might be in a far more undeveloped position at a date long subsequent to the nations of antiquity. Nevertheless, his preface is good reading to this day, and may be recommended to the careful reader for a not indifferent exposition of the value of traditional lore. Brand's *Popular Antiquities* has remained the best of this class of book, and, when Sir Henry Ellis edited it in 1813, and again in 1842, adding notes and material from early English literature and dramas from some of the most recondite printed sources and from MS. sources, it became, and is, a book of great charm and value. Ellis's edition was included in the well known "Bohn Library" in 1849, and, if readers will be careful to observe that every analogy to a classical parallel does not carry with it of necessity a classical origin for the English rite or usage, they will learn much and profitably from this work.\*

It has been worth while tracing out thus briefly the history of this book because it illustrates so well the characteristics of this division of our subject. The book which comes nearest to it, remaining for two hundred years unpublished and resting in its MS. condition in the library of the British Museum, is John Aubrey's *Remaines of Gentilism and Judaism*, published by the Folk-lore Society. Unequal in value as different parts of this book undoubtedly are, it contains all sorts of good notes of customs collected by John Aubrey at and before the times of "the Civil Wars," that is, of course, the Commonwealth period. Like Brand's book, it is useless as an authority as to origins; but analogues are always worthy studying if we cannot accept them as necessarily implying also the original form. Another famous book of this class is Strutt's *Sports and Pastimes of the People of England*, which is to be obtained in several editions, of which that by Mr. Cox recently published is the most desirable. Then follow such books as Hampson's *Medii Aevi Kalendarium* (the Latin title covers an English dress), which deals with customs and usages appertaining to the various saints' and festival days; Brady's *Clavis Calendaria*, another book of the same sort; and, among

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\* A new edition of Brand is being prepared for publication by members of the Folk-lore Society.



modern compilations, Dyer's *Popular Customs*, Hope's *Holy Wells: Their Legends and Traditions*, and a few books dealing with special subjects. Turning to another branch of our subject are two charming books: Halliwell's *Nursery Rhymes and Traditions* and Chambers's *Popular Rhymes of Scotland*. Both of these are mere collections mostly from literary sources, but they are indispensable to the folk-lore reader, and will act as stimulants to further reading. In the domain of the folk-tale are such genuine books as Keightley's *Fairy Mythology* and Hazlitt's *Fairy Mythology of Shakespeare*, and a few others of the same kind.

This branch of our subject, too, introduces us to the folk-song and the ballad. Dixon's *Ancient Poems, Ballads, and Songs of the Peasantry of England* is a little book which was a sort of pioneer in this work, and is still a treasure-house of information and delightful reading, together with the corresponding volume in the same series of publications, Bell's *Early Ballads illustrative of History, Traditions, and Customs*.\* Few sections of folk-lore are more genuinely delightful to the ordinary reader who is pursuing a complete course than that of the folk-song and ballad. Often in a line or a verse is contained a whole world of ancient life, throwing up to our imagination a past which has irretrievably gone from among us, while in some of the ballads are scraps of history preserved in localities in the simple form of ballad narrative which can scarcely be surpassed for beauty and appealing simplicity.

We have now gone over the subject in its two early phases. We have attempted to indicate what to read and how to read, so that, whether the object be to become a fully equipped folk-lore student or to read that which will delight and instruct, there should be some method and some idea of the range of the subject. All the books of the class dealt with in this and the last paper have to be considered in the light of material for the folk-lorist—material taken direct from the people or material collected from books and out-of-the-way sources of information, of which there are so many. The Folk-lore Society is specially dealing with this latter branch in its series of "County Folk-lore," which consists of reprints of folk-lore material from published works not directly dealing with folk-lore. The work of actual collection from the people is going on; but every year lessens the chances of gaining anything of real value. Readers who

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\* Also English and Scottish Ballads by Prof. Child.

have delighted in the subject presented to them in the books recommended to their attention will do well to take note of anything they may hear among their friends or others with whom they come into contact or of anything they meet in a literary form in an unusual or unexpected place. They will help forward the cause by such notes.

We now come to the last section of books for the readers in folk-lore, namely, that dealing with the studies and results of folk-lore. Previous pages have shown the material available for the student : the following will show how the student has made use of what has been collected for him.

No folk-lorist can do without first reading Dr. Tylor's epoch-making *Primitive Culture*. True it is that this book is an anthropological work ; but the evidence of anthropology so often ends, as Dr. Tylor puts it, in the folk-lore of the civilized world that the true place of folk-lore can best be studied from the point of view presented by Dr. Tylor. It is valuable for other reasons. It is a sort of grammar of research, placing many difficult points in their right light, dismissing many theories which had run riot for many years, setting forth the lines upon which all students of man and his ways must proceed. Particularly in the definition and use of " survivals in culture " will the folk-lore student find immense help ; for it is as survivals that folk-lore alone exists. From Dr. Tylor's work the folk-lorist learns the place which his particular study occupies among the anthropological sciences. He will learn that in every society there are people who do not progress either in religion or in polity with the foremost of the nation. They are left stranded amidst the progress. They live in out-of-the-way villages, or in places where general culture does not penetrate easily ; they keep to old ways, practices, and ideas, following with religious awe all that their parents had held to be necessary in their lives. These people are living depositories of ancient history—a history that has not been written down, but which has come down by tradition. Knowing the conditions of survivals in culture, the folk-lorist uses them in the ancient meaning, not in their modern setting, tries to find out their significance and importance in relation to their origin, and thus lays the foundation for the science of folk-lore as it has been studied by Dr. Frazer, Mr. Hartland, Mr. Lang, Dr. Haddon, and others.

No name stands out more prominently as a folk-lore authority than that of Dr. Frazer. His *Golden Bough* is monumental not only as a work of research, but as a book



of folk-lore method. Personally, I do not think Dr. Frazer has proved all his points, and much consideration will have to be given to his conclusions before they can be finally accepted. But as to the general results of his work there is no doubt. Starting with a custom surviving in ancient Rome under the Empire, Dr. Frazer sets out to explain what this survival really was. He takes all its salient points, and one by one compares them with the savage conception of things until one is conscious of the fact that this survival in Imperial Rome was the last relic of a period when the people who inhabited this part of ancient Italy were in culture on the level of savages of to-day. The learning, acumen, and research of Dr. Frazer are conspicuous on every page, and they are displayed in a literary style which has the charm of giving pleasure to all who read.

Mr. Lang's studies are of a different order. He came upon a time which was under the influence of the late Prof. Max Müller, who, overburdened by the recent discoveries of the science of philology and the place of the Sanscrit language among Indo-European languages, took a line in the interpretation of myth which brought it wholly within the domain of language influences. It had a fateful influence. Numerous writers followed the same line, and folk-lore was nearly doomed as a part of anthropology when Mr. Lang came forward in its defence. His *Myth, Ritual, and Religion* was at its first issue a masterly and necessary answer to the school of Max Müller, and showed how the earliest dawn of western civilization appears in folk-lore as the customs, beliefs, and usages of primitive people. Mr. Lang has written on many branches of folk-lore, but perhaps his introduction to Grimms' "Fairy Tales" is the most complete study from his pen.

No one has fought the battle of the anthropological value of folk-lore with more skill and learning than Mr. Sidney Hartland, whose *Science of Fairy Tales* and *Legend of Perseus* are well known to every student. Mr. Hartland believes that fairy tales are but the reflection of ancient society as told in narrative form, just as floating custom and belief are the reflection in survival, and he shows that there is not an incident in folk-tale which is not represented by a custom or a belief among primitive peoples. His studies are an essential equipment to the reader in folk-lore. Mr. Edward Clodd follows the same line of thought, and in his published *Myths and Dreams* and *Tom Tit Tot* illustrates in a few special cases the anthropological value of folk-lore.

There are many books on the scientific value of folk-lore, but the student must be careful in selecting them. So many means exist for treating the subject in the wrong way that it is almost impossible to enumerate the works which one should avoid altogether and those which should be read with care. Mr. Farrer's *Primitive Manners and Customs* belong to the latter class, being a fine example of works from the point of view of the actual life of primitive people. Kelly's *Indo-European Folk-lore* was at the time of its publication a most useful work, and can still be read with advantage and profit, but it needs checking with the results of later research. Sir George Cox's *Introduction to Mythology and Folk-lore* is hardly worth reading at all in the light of modern research; but Miss Cox's *Introduction to Folk-lore*, though only covering a very small part of the subject, is most useful and sound.

Many books err by the practice of arranging folk-lore in sections which relate to modern life, instead of in accordance with the ancient type to which it belongs. It does not at all follow that the modern superstition attached to a particular object is valuable because of this attachment. Take, for instance, the belief that, if you put your right stocking on first when dressing, you will be lucky. This is generally classified among domestic customs; but its true position is among a large class of beliefs about the "right" and "left," which has an important place in the study. So many instances of so-called Nature worship—fire, light, wind, sun, moon, and so on—are not always to be studied in this connexion, but in a connexion which does not belong to Nature worship at all. Indeed, the subject of classification is a most important one, and leads students astray more often than almost any other problems they have to face.

And thus we have worked through the different phases of folk-lore as they should be undertaken by the careful reader. Only in a few cases has it been possible to refer to special books and authors; but the examples given are intended to be the means of helping readers to classify other books which they read. On no account must folk-lore be studied from what is obtained from one country. All countries contribute, and contribute equally. England may possess one survival in its most ancient form; Germany or France or Italy may, on the other hand, possess the most ancient form of another survival, and it is only by this process of comparison that we can arrive at the really ancient. Unfortunately, we do not possess for English folk-lore what Germany possesses in Grimms' great work, *Deutsche Mythologie*, trans-



lated into English by Mr. Stalybras. Such a work will remain a standard for all time, even though some of its conclusions and some of its methods of classification can now be shown to be faulty or wrong. It is monumental in its completeness, minuteness, and accuracy, and every reader will fly to it for information on almost every point. And with the name of Grimm it will be fitting to end this short account; for of all folk-lorists the two brothers rank highest for every quality which makes their works household books to every reader in folk-lore.

We now come to children's singing games, and in dealing with the folk-lore contained in these it is best to begin with those which contain incidents not necessary to a game, and which children are not likely to have invented. As a matter of fact there are all sorts of incidents in traditional games which can only be explained by reference to ancient custom, and it is safe to conclude that tradition has brought the games down from the time when such customs were in vogue. Certain ceremonies performed in earnest by adults have been imitated by children in play, and so perpetuated.

Beside the incidents, the method or mode of play in these games is equally important, and also proves their traditional origin. Games in early times, as now, fall primarily into two sections—boys' games and girls' games—and, although boys' games have mostly lost their traditional origin and have been altered in course of time by conventional methods, and are more difficult to trace, enough remains to prove their descent from custom. Few people would think when witnessing present-day football and cricket that these games, with their complicated rules, both had for their origin games for keeping up village feuds or religious ceremony. In tribal and village life, when the people of one place were antagonistic to those of another, the amusements of the children reflected this feeling, and contests and mimic warfare would be played. Where religious ceremonies were practised to unite families or villages in one common demand or thanksgiving, such ceremonies would be imitated in play and games, and, both conditions existing for a long period of time, it is not surprising that the play of the people reflects it strongly. It must be remembered too that, though we now speak of games and play as belonging to children, in olden times these games were the amusements or recreations of their elder brothers and sisters and their parents. As time went on it is natural that those amusements which had for their basis the elements of fighting and contest should be considered the

play proper to boys, and those having for their basis ceremonial custom should, from their reflecting home life, come to be played by both sexes together, and then by girls only and small boys, and the girls' games, being less used for set games, have retained more of the customs indicating their origin.

We will first take the methods of play in traditional games. There are several. There is (1) the line form, (2) the circle or ring form, (3) the arch form, (4) the winding-up form and (5) the individual form; and into one of these forms all traditional games fall, each form being significant of the meaning of the game. The line form of game is played by two lines or rows of children. The two lines stand facing one another at a distance of several yards. Each line in turn advances midway and retires, singing their respective verses or parts.

The line games represent a contest and are characterized by no one player being distinguished above his fellows: all on one side say the same words and do the same actions, and one side stands still and hears what the other side has to say. Questions are asked and answers given, and these form an essential part of the line form of game. They all represent contests, and contests for different purposes.

The principal contest games are boys' games for obtaining ground or territory, and it is evident the contest is between people of different parishes. There are raids into neighbouring counties for food, property, and prisoners. There are also contests for wives of a more or less friendly or bartering nature. That the lines of players represent people of one place invaded or visited by people who come from another is shown by the fact that a line is drawn in the middle of the ground, this line separating the territory of the two sides.

There are several typical games of this kind. One of the best of the purely fighting kind—of an invading and a defending force—is "We are the Rovers." Here the attacking party announce, "We are coming to take your land—we are the Rovers," and are answered by "We don't care for your men nor you, though you're the Rovers." There are many verses of defiance and contempt for the opposite side and an attempt to obtain food or property. The game ends with "Take your guns and fire away," and the players pretend to fight until one side gets possession of the other's ground. In some parts where this game was played stones and sticks were used, and a real fight would ensue. This game survived in its best version in the "marches" of Wales



and the border country of Cumberland, Northumberland, and Scotland. The game is given in full, with many versions, in the *Dictionary of Traditional Games*, Vol. II, pages 343-360. The tune is extremely inspiring.

Another line game, one of the best known, is "Nuts in May." In this the contest is not for territory, but for an individual—to capture prisoners. The lines are formed and the ground is marked out. The invading line say they have come to gather "nuts in May," and proceed to demand a certain girl for "nuts in May." The demand is resisted, but a certain player is sent to fetch her, and a contest ensues between the girl demanded and a chosen "strong man." If the girl is pulled over the line, she remains and becomes one of the successful side. In some places, after the girl has been pulled across, the boy who pulls her must place his hand on her head before leaving hold. If he omits this or cannot do it, the girl may return to her own side, and the same line try again. This game is typical of the custom of marriage by capture.

Another—also a line game, with marriage customs for its origin—is "Three Dukes a-Riding." This indicates a friendly but formal visit of young men to a village for the purpose of obtaining wives outside their own village. Originally this was an actual capture of wives, but afterwards developed into formal custom. There is no antagonism shown—the visit is expected and welcome; but there is no individual courtship shown, and no mention of love. The girls are carried off in triumph by the Dukes, but it is a friendly affair and not resisted by the one side. "Three Knights from Spain" and "Three Sailors" are also games indicating the same origin, with parental authority shown.

The above games being played in line form—a form proved to be used for contest—it is certain that when a custom like marriage takes place between young people of the same village, and perhaps at a more civilized time, a different method would be used; and this, we find, is done: for all marriage games where courtship takes place between individuals the circle form is used; and we have also in these circle games the knowledge that a ceremony was performed legalizing or establishing the marriage. The circle represents the assembled friends and villagers, and also the place where such ceremonies were held.

It must be remembered that the joining of hands by a group, all saying the same words and performing the same

actions, is significant of belief and participation in the same ceremony by that group, and symbolizes combined action.

The circle form being used for such ceremonies as marriage, we shall expect to find it also used to indicate other ceremonies in which the whole village participated; and this is the case. We shall see, among others, that harvest customs (a most important group) have all survived in games and are played in circle form.

We will first take examples of marriage games, and the others later on.

As examples of marriage games in circle form we will take the well known "Sally Water" and "Poor Mary sits a-weeping." In "Sally Water" one child, the girl to be married, kneels in the centre. The words are sung by the circle. They are:

Sally, Sally Water,  
Sprinkle in the pan,  
Cry, Sally, cry, Sally,  
For a young man;  
Choose for the worst, choose for the best,  
Choose the very one you love best.

The child in the centre chooses a boy from the circle, and the circle dances round, singing:

Now you're married, we wish you joy,  
First a girl and then a boy,  
Seven years after son and daughter;  
Pray young couple come kiss together.

Here it will be seen the two principal characters have no words to say. One chooses another, and the bond is sealed with a kiss, and, in some instances, with joining of hands. The friends approve, and a blessing and good wishes from all follow for their happiness. The period mentioned—seven years—is that of the old popular notion of the time for which marriage vows were binding. The mention of "sprinkling" in this rhyme draws particular attention to the use through nearly all versions of this word and that of "water." The word "Sally," usually considered to mean the name of a girl, I think is possibly a corruption of some other word, and that the word "Water" is connected not with the name of a girl, but with the action of sprinkling which she is called upon to fulfil. The sitting or kneeling position indicates a reverential attitude. The girl is called upon to "rise and choose a young man"; she is also described as "crying for a young man." This "crying" for a young man—words which are found in several marriage



games—does not, as is usually thought, mean “weeping.” It rather, in my opinion, means “announcing a want” in the way “wants” or “losses” are announced or “cried for” by the official crier of a town, and in the same way that children in some games “cry” forfeits. This announcing that a lover or husband was required is not an unknown thing. The choosing of the girl sometimes is “to the east” and “to the west” instead of “for the best” and “for the worst.” The expression, “for better, for worse,” is an old marriage formula preserved in the vernacular portion of the old English marriage service, and I think we have the same formula here. The final admonition is to “choose the one loved best,” followed after the choice by the marriage formula or sanction, “Now you’re married, we wish you joy.”

In the game “Poor Mary sits a-weeping” the same remarks apply, the difference being that the girl herself announces her wish. There are other marriage games in the circle form, in which the making and eating of a particular “food” or “pudding” is mentioned. This is to be prepared by the bride, and she is to give some to her bridegroom. This, of course, refers to the bridal cake, and refers to the old custom of the bride preparing it herself, and giving some of it first to her newly made husband. This eating of the same food forms an essential portion of marriage customs among primitive peoples.

“Oats and Beans and Barley,” a circle game, indicates customs originating with sowing and harvesting of grain—customs in which all the people of a village would be engaged. The words are:

Oats and beans and barley grow;  
Do you or I or any one know  
How oats and beans and barley grow?  
First the farmer sows his seed,  
Then he stands and takes his ease,  
Stamps his foot and claps his hands,  
And turns him round to view the land,  
Waiting for a partner.  
Open the ring and send one in.  
Now you’re married you must obey;  
You must be true to all you say;  
You must be kind, you must be good,  
And help your wife to chop the wood.

The players walk round in circle form, all singing the words and all performing certain actions. They all imitate action of sowing, then stand and fold arms to stand at ease; then

stamp their feet and clap hands, turn round, and "view the land." They then join hands again, dance round, singing the remaining lines.

The rural origin and the antiquity of this game are shown by the fact that wheat is not mentioned in the majority of versions, wheat being in early times an exceptional crop—the people living on oatmeal and barley bread. It also probably refers to the time when most of the land lay in grass and open fields were cultivated; also to the time when village festivals and dances were held after spring sowings and harvest gatherings, and when it was thought necessary to the proper growth of the crops that a religious ceremony should be performed to propitiate the earth spirit.

The marriage formula in this game is equally interesting. It implies that, after sowing, preparations are made for the indoor work, for which a partner or wife is necessary. The first two lines are probably an injunction to the wife and the second two to the husband:

You must be kind, you must be good,  
And help your wife to chop the wood.

The importance of wood-chopping at a time before coal was known as everyday fuel need not be emphasized.

Another harvest game of the same kind is: "Would you know how doth the peasant?" Here actions are performed imitative of sowing, reaping, threshing, and, after these, praying and sleeping.

I will mention here "Jenny Jones," because of the funeral customs it perpetuates, although it is not a circle, but a "line" game. "Jenny Jones" is so well known, it is unnecessary to give all the words. It shows the death of a girl and her funeral. I think it is really more than this: it is, in the first place, the courting of a maiden or maidens by one or more suitors. The words, it will be remembered, begin: "We have come to see Jenny Jones." These are said by the line of players, and repeated until the girl's death is mentioned. The other line, representing mother and maidens, mentions that "Jenny is washing," "ironing," "cleaning," and then is "ill," "dying," and "dead." The line then apparently change characters, and represent village girls undertaking the funeral of one of their number. They ask what colour Jenny shall be buried in. After red, blue, and others are mentioned, white is generally selected, for "white is what the dead wear." Dressing in white indicated formerly mourning for a maiden. The players carry the



dead maiden a short distance, lay her on the ground, then stand around and sing. In some versions after this the supposed dead Jenny jumps up and runs after the other players, who call out, "The ghost! The ghost!" This indicates belief that the spirit of the dead rises to haunt the place and hold commune with the living.

Another circle game shows this belief, which was widely prevalent, of the knowledge possessed by the dead about the living. The game is known as "Old Roger," and the story is that of the planting of a tree over the grave of a dead person. This game is specially interesting. The players stand in circle form. One lies down in the centre and three others stand outside and run into the circle in turn when mentioned, performing their parts in dumb show. Only those in the circle sing the words, and they stand still. The words are :

Old Roger is dead and gone to his grave!  
 H'm! ha! gone to his grave!  
 They planted an apple tree over his head.  
 The apples were ripe and ready to drop;  
 There came an east wind and blew them all off;  
 There came an old woman a-picking them up;  
 Old Roger jumped up and gave her a knock,  
 Which made the old woman go hippity hop!

The players show signs of mourning. One player, the Apple Tree, runs into the circle and stands at the head of Old Roger. She raises and lowers her arms to indicate the falling apples when the East Wind runs in and "blows" round the tree. The Old Woman goes in next and pretends to pick up some apples. Old Roger then gets up, goes after the Old Woman, and beats her. She leaves the ring hobbling as if hurt and lamed. Here, it is plainly shown, the spirit of the dead Old Roger enters into the tree and resents the carrying away of the fruit, which represents a part of "himself," by rising and making the Old Woman drop the apples; for, had she retained possession of these, she would have had power over his soul or spirit and might compel him to do her bidding and work ill to others living.

The interest of this game is enhanced because of its method of play. There is first the circle of players, and, in addition, we have what may be called four principal characters. The circle act as "chorus" to the play: that is to say, they tell you in words the meaning of the actions performed by the others. This is also the case in "Round and round the Village": the circle act as "chorus," and the two players act

their part in dumb show, although the acting here is not so individual.

We will now take the "arch" form of the traditional game. Here two players form an arch by holding up their joined hands, and the rest of the players run under while singing the words. "London Bridge" is played in this form. The story of this game is that "London Bridge" has fallen down; then it must be rebuilt, and different materials are suggested for this purpose. "Penny loaves," "iron bars," "pins and needles," "gold and silver," and "stone"—these are all rejected as useless, and then a prisoner is taken and ransom suggested. It cannot be paid, and the prisoner goes to prison.

It was formerly a custom when new buildings were erected, particularly by streams, that sacrifice of a human victim should be made to appease the earth and water deities who might be supposed to resent buildings being erected and the earth being disturbed in their domain. Many are the instances which could be given of this in stories of old castles and churches, and particularly of bridges. There is a tradition that the stones of London Bridge were bespattered with the blood of little children and the mortar mixed with the blood of beasts. Prisoners were used as foundation sacrifices, and were forced to enter a hole or cavity left on purpose in the building, which was then walled or built up, enclosing the victim. After the human victim ceased to be sacrificed animals and birds were offered, and at a later period still, when the custom itself was no longer in vogue, men and animals were imprisoned in a hole in the walls for a short time and confined until a ransom was paid instead. In this game, the children, passing under the arch, taking a prisoner and demanding a ransom, indicate the later stage of the foundation sacrifice—that where the prisoner was released on ransom being paid.

There is another and a most popular game played in "arch" form—the well known "Oranges and Lemons." In this game, after all the players have run under the arch and a prisoner has been taken, this prisoner is given the choice of "sides," either to become "Orange" or "Lemon." She takes her place behind the leader of the chosen side. When all have been made prisoners and chosen their sides, a tug follows between the two leaders and their followers. This tug indicates a contest or a preparation for it; but this game does not, as the line games do, indicate an invading and invaded party, and the fight is not for territory. The



words indicate town or city life. The ringing of the bells is significant of the calling together of people living in cities and villages. Bells were rung on all occasions when it was necessary to call the people together; and this game may survive from the time when people assembled in market places and open spaces when summoned to join their respective leaders for the purpose of joining in frays or for defence when an enemy was in sight. The names "Oranges" and "Lemons" indicate, I believe, the "colours" of different leaders, and were the badges or signs by which each man knew and recognized his leader and was himself known. While the passing under the arch is not necessary in order that the players may exercise their choice of leader, nor the secrecy observed necessary either, yet this passing under must be significant and have its origin in custom. It may signify the passing under the banner of the chief, the entrance into a walled city, the compulsory attendance of a vassal under pain of punishment to serve, or the taking prisoner and condemning to death of those serving on the opponent's side. This sentence of death was often commuted on condition of changing sides. Passing prisoners under a yoke to signify servitude was an old custom.

In the winding-up form of game there are not many examples surviving. This may be attributed to various reasons. This method consists of players joining hands in one long line, the tallest player at one end. The line then winds itself round and round the tallest player until all are formed in a number of circles close together. They then unwind, still holding hands, sometimes running and dancing in a serpentine fashion until all are in straight line again. These games probably refer to the custom of encircling trees as an act of worship. The words have usually some mention of trees. The game is, like a circle game, the custom of the people of one place; but, unlike the circle, one player is stationary, and hold or attachment must be kept to the person surrounded. There is dancing or jumping up and down, and sometimes falling on the ground, when all players are "wound up" or surrounding the tree.

I have now given examples of the different methods found in traditional games, together with a brief account of the customs originating them. There is yet another form of game, which I call the "individual" form, and which might not at first be thought to be traditional at all. This is where the "line" and the "circle" and the "arch" disappear. The chief players take each a character and speak their re-

spective parts, those who have nothing to say usually being represented as "children" of one of the characters. The singing, too, has dropped. These games, or "plays"—for such they are—have customs or traditions for their story, but the stories are usually of a later period. A very striking example is known as "The Witch," or "Mother, the pot boils over." Here we have for characters a "mother," a "witch," "a pot," an "elder daughter," and a number of others—at least seven—who are the mother's children and young. These have no words to say. The story is this. A mother is going out washing: she tells her eldest daughter and gives her charge of the young ones; tells her to be careful of the witch and not to let her in, and to be sure and not allow the pot to boil over. After the mother has gone the witch appears, and asks for a light or a coal from the fire, her own having gone out. The girl gives it, the witch enters and runs off with one of the children, and the pot boils over. The daughter calls to her mother, who returns, finds a child gone, scolds her daughter, gives her directions as before, and again goes to work. The same thing happens until all the children have gone. The mother then hears a terrible noise from the boiling over of the pot, and goes in search of the little ones. She meets the witch, who misdirects her, until, finally, she recovers the children and the witch is taken prisoner. There is not much of the dialogue left, and I have been able to recover but few versions, but what there is is very spirited and dramatic.

The game embodies the survival of belief in fire and hearth worship. The pot boiling over is evidently the work of the guardian of the hearth, the sacred fire always burning. The witch obtaining a light from this fire obtains power over and gets possession of one of the inmates of the house, who are otherwise protected by the fire-spirit or hearth-goddess; the pot boils over, the hearth is sullied. The belief in the power of witches over children and their desire to capture them and make them into witches or kill and eat them for food survived until recently, and may not be quite extinguished yet. They are the people of another world who are always trying to injure those of this. The records of the trials of witches attest this. While this is the most complete story of this form of game, there are several in more or less fragmentary form.

There are many other games; but sufficient have been named to show their interest, and also the practical impossibility of their having originated in anything but custom.



The fact that in studying these games I am obliged to use the terms "district," "tribe," "localities"—obliged to speak of a state of contest between groups of people, of the assembling of people to witness a ceremony, of the sacred encircling of trees, and other significant usages—goes far to suggest that they must contain some element which is essential to them. An element is present which does not necessarily belong to games, but belongs to other and more important branches of human action; and it depends on what this element is as to what can be said of the origin and survival of the games.

It will be noted that, in speaking of the customs in these games, I have shown marriage and funeral customs existing under a very different state of affairs than at present obtains. It does not follow because young maids marry in the manner indicated in the games, or were buried under such conditions, that there was no religious authority nor significance for them; but it is important to bear in mind that we are not dealing with present-day observances or with the religion of the present Church. In these games it is most significant that the marriage ceremony, sacred rite, social or other customs do not take us to the religion of to-day, but to non-Christian rites. They are therefore pre-Christian rites, and the games take us to pre-Christian religions and social customs, and this is sufficient to stamp them with an antiquity which alone would certify to the importance and value of studying this branch of folk-lore.

In order to complete the study of children's games, it is necessary to inquire why these games have lasted—what is the controlling force which has preserved ancient customs in the form of games. The mere telling of a game or tale from a parent to a child, or from child to child, is not sufficient. There must be a force inherent in these games which has allowed them to be continued from one generation to another—a force as strong as or stronger than the customs which first brought the games into existence, and this force I consider to be the dramatic faculty inherent in mankind.

The love of the dramatic is immensely strong in children: children love to imitate, and love to imitate those they like or dislike, and objects familiar to them in their everyday life. Every one acquainted with children will remember instances of the way children seize upon some special action characteristic of a person or animal they intend to represent. Words are not sufficient. When wishing to personate an animal the child fixes at once on some action which is special

to it, and separates it in the child's mind from other animals. The child performs actions which to him and to other children are typical of that special creature, and in imagination the child has ceased to be for the time a boy or a girl, and is a horse, dog, or cow. Children, for instance, never personate a horse and a cow by the same actions. Horses toss their heads, paw the ground, prance, and are restless when standing; they wear harness, and the driver has reins and a whip. When a child is a cow he walks in a slower, heavier way, lowers the head, stares about, lies down and munches, and rubs his head (horns) against a table or chair, this being no longer a table or chair, but a tree. When a child personates an engine the actions used are completely different. The feet are kept as much on the ground as possible in moving fast, because the legs have become wheels, and the arms have become propellers; puffing and screeching and letting off steam are imitated. These are done entirely on the child's initiative, and the more observant the child the closer is identification with the object imitated. When children play in groups the same things occur. Instances could be given *ad nauseam*. It cannot, therefore, surprise us that in these games children should be found to use actions which to them indicate certain persons or things, although the words they use may render action unnecessary. A child becomes by standing still, a tree, a house, or a stone wall, a window, &c. If an animal is required, the child goes on hands and knees; if a gate, house, or castle is wanted, two join hands and form an entrance, because houses or cities have to be entered; if mothers and children are required, the smaller ones are made the children.

There is, then, no difficulty as to the reason why children should have continued playing these games when once they have seen or played them, nor why they should not have embodied in a game some of the manners and customs which were constantly going on around them.

We know that many of these games up to a few years ago were played as amusements by young men and young women. In country districts it was the general practice for men and women to join together in playing these games at fairs and festivals. It is unlikely that adults would seriously play at children's games; but children, seeing their elders' amusements, would adopt such of those as suited them and they understood, until these became in their turn too childish for them. It will be remembered that it is not so many years since the then educated and cultured classes amused them-



selves by occupations now deemed silly and unfit even for the younger generation.

This natural instinct to dramatic action in children is paralleled by the same instinct in grown-up people when in a state of culture where they are chiefly dependent upon their natural capacities for existence. Evidence of this natural dramatic power in the savage and semi-civilized peoples is abundant. Their dances are strongly dramatic. They advance in lines dancing, gesticulating, and singing; they dance in circles, joining hands; they go down on all fours, imitating animal postures and noises; they wear special masks, dresses, and ornaments on these occasions, all of which have significance for their audience and themselves. These dances are ceremonial, and are performed to ensure good results from hunting and fishing expeditions, and from cultivation of the ground. To ensure success to their side in war-time they imitate in ceremonial dances actions they will perform when fighting, and this is done by them in the belief that it pleases their gods, and will induce them to help them.

There were still surviving until comparatively recent times among the peoples of Europe ceremonial dances accompanied with song and action, some in connexion with religious services and some in connexion with the more ordinary affairs of life. Representations in pantomime of the different actions used in sowing the grain, its growth, and the consequent reaping, binding, and carrying the grain are still practised in different parts of the world. Ceremonies are performed to induce rain to fall and to avert disastrous storms, to bring good luck on the newly married, and to avert evil from the people and the village. Pantomimic action is also used as a sort of oral contract performed in the presence of witnesses. In a book published in 1641 instances are given of its being customary at harvest homes to give representations of "hirings" of farm servants. The hiring, the work the farm labourer had to do, his terms of service, and the food to be supplied him were dramatically performed, showing clearly that it had been customary to go through this sort of thing in earnest of what was expected on both sides.

Anthropology has taught us that in times of joy and mirth, sorrow and loss, victory and defeat, weddings and funerals, plagues and pestilences, famine and plenty, civilized and savage alike dance, act, and sing their griefs and their joys. The gods of all nations have been worshipped by pantomimic

dance and song, their altars and temples were encircled by their worshippers, and, as the occasion was one of fear or joy, and the god entreated or terrified by his followers, so would the actions and voices of the dancers be in accord. The god is shown what his people want done, and he is entreated or threatened according to the people's ideas of what is most likely to ensure their wishes being carried out by him.

When once particular actions performed were recognized as successful, fitting, or beautiful, they would tend to become repeated and stereotyped, and the same forms would be used for other gods, other occasions, and other customs where requirements were similar. The circle dance, for instance, after being performed several times, would necessarily become a part of the religious customs, and form a part of ordinary religious observance. It would become particularly associated with the place where it was first instituted or found effectual, and would be used to inaugurate other festivals at other places.

We know that the early Christians, when taking over to their use the temples and altars of their so-called heathen predecessors, or when erecting a church where a temple had previously stood, held their worship there and performed their dances to their God as the heathen had done to theirs. The custom of encircling a church on its festival day existed until lately in several parishes in England, and this could only be a descendant of the custom once held sacred of all the followers of one belief demonstrating by their action in group form the fact that they all believed in the same thing, and demonstrated, by clasp of hands and the dance round, their determination to hold to and keep to it.

If these customary dances obtained and have survived in religious ritual to the present day, is it not to be expected that we should find survivals in dance form of non-religious customs which also impressed themselves strongly in the minds of the people; or rather, I should say, of other customs formerly held to be religious and to require the sanction of ceremony, but now deemed purely secular? The facts of births, marriages, death, the sowing and gathering in of the food of the people, the protection of man and cattle from disease and from animals of prey, the necessity for water and fire for the house and the village have been surrounded with ceremonials which have lasted and been transmitted from generation to generation—altering to suit later ideas, it is true, but preserving through all some trace of the events which first called them into existence. More especially have their dra-



matic forms survived. This it is which made them, when no longer needed as religious ceremonies, appeal so strongly to the natural dramatic instinct that they became the "plays" of the people and the children.

The study of children's games then leads us into several departments of research. Many traces of customs, not of modern life, take us back to very early times. The weapons are bows and arrows, the amusements hunting and other old sports; animals are found in such close relationship to human beings that only primitive conditions of life would allow; contests occur between men and women in a way that takes us back to one of the earliest known customs of marriage—marriage by capture; then to a later stage, where purchase or equivalent value obtains; then to a marriage with a ceremony which takes us back to the earliest forms of such ceremonies. That such customs can be suggested in connexion with these games goes far to prove that they originate the game—that no other theory satisfactorily accounts for all the phenomena.

In looking for the motive power which has caused the continuity of these customs to be practised as amusements (for without this strong motive power there would be no adequate reason for the survival and preservation of these games by children) we have found that the dramatic power or instinct inherent in mankind, and particularly strong in young animals and young children, supplies the necessary evidence, and from this stage we are led to an interesting point in the early history of the drama and of the stage. I cannot enter on this here, but it is evident that no history of the origin of the drama can be complete which does not take into consideration the influence which this dramatic representation of custom has had upon its origin and development.

It is not too much to say that the traditional games of children should be placed alongside the folk-tale and the folk-song, and considered and taught as some of the oldest historical documents belonging to our race, showing man's progress from one stage of civilization to another.

It has not been possible in our short space to deal with all games or with all the customs here indicated; nor with those where animals are personified and brought into close relationship with home and village life; nor with those games better known as boys' games, such as "French and English," "Prisoner's Base," which have had their origin in custom too. There are many games where the singing has disappeared, and only a few words are left to indicate

their meaning; but, while the method of play and actions remains, it is possible to put these, too, into their respective places; all repay investigation, and the merest fragments become interesting and valuable when studied from the point of view of folk-lore.



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